

The
Choreography
of Time

Maria Passanha

17.11.2025

Part I.

He lived by a schedule only he could keep.

Papers piled up like unfinished steps, the phone rang all the time in sharp counts.

Stop, Start. Stop, start.

Footsteps returned late at night, steady, stubborn, the same.

Deadlines

Overlapped

Deadlines

Overlapped

Deadlines

as if they were notes in a song played too fast, each one louder than the one before.

Meetings ran into meetings and mornings into nights.

Appointments ticked off, tasks crossed out, one more project finished.

Work was its own clock, ticking louder than the one inside his chest.

That ticking was already unsteady.

One moment he stood there, the next he was off beat, he slipped, he fell.

Not loudly, not enough for him to notice at first.

But the balance was lost, one step taken by another and the sequence collapsed.

A pause.

The clock skipped a beat.

Silence.

Then the sirens took the stage, red lights spinning like a spotlight in the dark.

They said he was fine and sent him home.

But anyone listening closely could hear it. The rhythm wasn't right anymore.

The music had changed, and the body didn't know the steps.



...

Hours stretch longer than they should.

The corridor is white, too white.

The kind of white that swallows color until nothing is left.

The double doors at the end barely open, just a slip, then closed again.

Nothing moves.

People sit in rows of chairs set along the sides, like an audience.

But this audience has forgotten what they came to see.

A Trolley passes by, its noise stays too long, leaving the silence heavier.

A cough.

A voice coming from the back of the room.

Legs swing under the chairs. Heels tap against the floor in an uneven rhythm,

like a performance no one rehearsed.

The clock on the wall hangs useless,

frozen in

its

own

pose.

Watching without pity as he bends time out of shape.

He says five minutes have passed, when everyone feels it has been an hour.

Seconds don't walk forward, they stall, lean against the walls, and fold back on themselves.

Counting the lines on the floor is impossible.

The numbers slip out of order, blur, morph into each other.

Every time the count begins, it ends back at the start.

Is the clock still ticking?



Time folds over again.

It stretches not only longer, but wider now, filling every corner until the silence reaches the ceiling.

The waiting circles like a spin, but without music to guide it.

Too many pauses, too many false starts, no one knows when to enter or when to leave.

The clock does not move.

It holds us hostage.

Silent and cruel.

Bodies sit like dancers already in costume, waiting for a cue that never comes.

Beneath the quiet, a heart waits too.

When the silence breaks, will the beat still be his?

...

Someone reached in and set the clock ticking again.

The rhythm returned, louder than it had been in years.

It felt impossible, this restart, like the music skipped during a performance and somehow, he landed on the right count.

The first days were quiet steps. Careful, small, deliberate.

A sip of water, the slow bend of muscles that had forgotten their work.

Every motion was rehearsal, retraining.

The choreography was fragile, made of more pauses than gestures.

He stood still for minutes that felt like hours, listening to the sound of his own pulse,

one

two

three

waiting for the curtain to come up again.

Light moved across the floor, the shadow was slow and golden, stretching over the walls and fading back. Marking time in silence.



Days passed by, and the steps grew larger. From the bed to the corridor.

From the corridor to the garden. From the garden back to the desk, where papers waited.

They had been waiting all along.

Inside the house, everything moved carefully in quiet patterns.

People stepped softly around him, as if the air itself might break.

They wanted to come close, to hold him,

Arms opened for a hug, but then stopped halfway.

Every gesture became half a dance, an approach and a pause, moving with rules he didn't choose.

It could have been a new routine.

Lighter steps, a chance to learn how to move differently, to stretch into new shapes.

For a while it almost seemed possible.

He walked, he worked, he laughed again.

But the movements were too familiar, and the pull of old habits was too strong.

He told himself this time the dance would be slower,

that he would listen for silence between each beat.

But the quiet didn't survive for long.

It thinned and disappeared.



And slowly the world began knocking again.

The stage cleared for something new, but slowly the props made their way back to him.

First a phone call, quick and excusable.

Then an email, a stack of papers, a meeting squeezed in,

the amount of work crept back.

In a second, the music of deadlines grew faster than the rhythm beating inside

his chest.

This new rhythm kept ticking, insistent, waiting to be noticed.

Every time was a chance to move away and learn a different part.

But he moved as if nothing had changed.

The score was already written.

He felt the steps falling out of place,

so he moved faster, trying to catch them,

not because it felt right, but because the silence behind felt heavier.

because stopping was the one thing he didn't know how to do.



...

Now he spins in a pirouette, the world passes by so fast he can barely see it.

To find balance in that motion, he fixes one spot and returns to it each turn.

Work became that spot again, the mark that he trusts.

And so, time bends back on itself.

The steps he thinks are going forward circle to where he started.

He lived by a schedule only he could keep.

Papers piled again, the same unfinished steps.

The phone rang in sharp counts. Stop, Start. Stop, start.

Footsteps returned late at night, steady, stubborn, the same.

Part II.

I keep time.

I always have.

He thinks it's his schedule, his rhythm, his control.

But I am the one who holds it all together.

From my place on the wall, I watch him move.

Papers pile beneath me.

The phone rings in sharp counts,

stop, start. Stop start,

and every ring lands somewhere b e t w e e n my seconds.



He lives by a schedule only he can keep, but it runs through me first.

Every deadline, every late night return,

I mark them all.

My hands trace the same circle again and again,

While his footsteps drag themselves home,

steady, stubborn, the same.

He doesn't look at me much anymore.

He doesn't have to.

His body has learned my rhythm by heart.

One night the movement changed

The pattern dropped.

He fell, collapsed, a step that wasn't part of the dance.

His hand reached for the table, but missed.

He sank, slow then sudden

I'm the only one watching.

I keep ticking, What else can I do ?

My seconds fell over him, useless and exact, measuring a moment no one wanted.

The room fills with red and blue.

Sirens shout over my soft regular pace, and almost disrupt my rhythm.

People rush in, their movements are sharp and practised,

They don't look at me either.

They bring their own screens, monitors and numbers that jump around.

The door closes behind them.

I am left ticking in an empty room.



...

I keep time in the hallway.

I hang above a color drained wall, high enough to see every head gathered beneath me.

They don't want to watch me,

But they do.

All of them.

Their eyes flick upward, away, then back again,

a quiet, nervous rhythm.

It feels like I'm performing a solo I never auditioned for.

I like the attention.

Every tilt of a chin,

Every quick stare lands on me.

They study my hands, my stillness, my tiny shifts.

I linger on each second, stretch it like a note I don't want to release,

Keeping the spotlight on me, for one more full circle.



When the double doors open,

every head turns at once.

A Single motion.

They turn back to me again, as if checking whether the moment counted.

Someone wipes their palms on their jeans,
Someone counts quietly under their breath.
Someone closes their eyes,
But still lifts their head every few seconds to make sure I haven't changed.
I'm still dancing my solo...

I keep going,
turning with the same anchor point, offering the only thing I can,
a solo on stage.
Steady enough to hold their fear for a moment longer.

I can't go back,
My hands only move forward, shifting the spotlight.
Carrying me into the next part of the dance, whether I want to or not.
And then, at last, the moment breaks.

Heads drop. Shoulders loosen.
Someone exhales like they'd been holding the note with me.
The lights shift, the corridor empties,
My solo ends.
Applause. Not loud, but full of relief that I didn't fall on stage under their watch .



...

I am with him again.

He opens his eyes and sees me immediately.

Not the quick, distracted glance of habit, he used to give me on the way out,

But something slower.

I hold still.

Not because I have to, but because I want to see how long he'll look.

Its strange to be seen this way

Sometimes he watches my hands move,

He studies the line of my shadow and the click he once ignored.

He starts moving again,

But differently.



People come in and out, carefully.

Hands hover behind him like shadows that want to reach him but can't.

It's me and him at the center.

Two bodies trying to match a rhythm neither of us remembers perfectly.

There are moments when he sits perfectly still and watches me turn.

In those moments, I feel him trying to meet my timing, to fall in circle with me,

To let the world outside wait. For once.

It almost works...

A new choreography begins to form,

Not rushed,

Not forced,

Just two bodies sharing one beat, for the first time in years.

But it doesn't last.

It never does.

Noise finds him again,

I feel the vibration of the first phone call,

creeping up the wall towards me like a step landing where it shouldn't.

I feel the shift right away,

He moves too fast, Faster than I can hold,

I feel it.

I feel something inside me pull,

Tight,

Tighter,

Until I can't hold it anymore.

Suddenly, a loud, strong crack cuts across my face, loud enough to stop the room.

A break that sends everything loose.



My hands slip,

The circle breaks open.

Numbers burst out of me, like pieces of light rolling across the floor,
hitting the walls, spinning into corners.

The six hides in the shadow.

The nine spins twice and falls on its side.

The twelve rolls farther than the rest and stops by the doorway.

The three settles near his foot.

Seconds fall everywhere, quick flashes that fade as they hit the ground.

I try to grab them, but everything slips away. They're already out of reach.

He finally looks up.

The break pulls his eyes to me,

Not surprised, as if he already knew.

He steps closer, carefully lifts me down from the wall, with my broken frame, and sets me aside.

He hangs a new one in my place.

Clean face,

Closed circle.

Hands ready to find their path.

It Ticks once.

Below, he falls back into the rhythm he knows,

Quick turns, the same circle, always returning to that fixed spot on the wall.

Papers began to pile again.

The phone rang in sharp counts again and again.

His late footsteps traced the same path across the floor,

Steady and stubborn,

The same.

...

I keep time

I always have.